

The History of the Round Barn Farm

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The Round Barn Farm has brought a rich history to Manhattan in Will County, Illinois, over the years. The money the Round Barn has made has helped improve and add to the farm.

In the early 1830s, Manhattan Township as we know it was inhabited by a few wolf hunters and Indians in a temporary hunting camp. The land that Round Barn rests on is called Five Mile Grove. The creek that runs through the grove is called Jackson Creek. The 1840 census showed only two families living in Manhattan. Clark Baker, from New York, came to the Manhattan area in 1842, and he bought half of Bushrod Buck's land. In 1848, he bought a southern quarter of Bushrod Buck's land.

Clark Baker, his wife and five children remained at Five Mile Grove until 1850 and were said to have in 'poor circumstances'. However, by 1877, the Bakers owned more than 1200 acres. He also served as Township Supervisor for ten years and justice of the peace for twenty-five years. Baker's son, John, managed the farm and directed the two round barns he built there in 1898. Clark Baker died before the barns were built. The lumber used to build the barns came from the World's Fair in Chicago.

At first the farm was known as Grove Stock Farms and raised short-horned cattle and Chester White hogs under Clark's son, John. The completed barn measures a hundred feet in diameter and sixty feet high and was one of the largest round barns in Illinois. The four-level building took approximately five years to construct and was one of the five round barns built in Will County.

From the mid-1950s, Frank Koren has owned the Round Barn. He raised beef cattle until about 1985. In 1986, the barn underwent minor construction to make it a public museum. The barn was designated a Will County Historic Landmark on, November 18, 1999.

The original Round Barn is now the Round Barn Museum. The museum displays artifacts from 1800 to the early-1900s that were used in the local area. The barn museum has five levels. The first one contains many pieces of horse-drawn farm machinery. The first level originally housed cows and horses used in the dairy operations. The second level held hay while the third level was an apartment. The second level now holds various items used on the farm. The third level holds items used in a farm home and the fourth level is a good spot for viewing the architecture of the inside of the barn. The fifth level allows air to circulate inside the barn.

The historic name for the barn is John C. Baker Barn. Its well-known name is Baker-Koren Barn otherwise known as Round Barn Farm Museum. In March 2003, the idea of making the Round Barn a rural gem occurred. The current owner, Frank Koren, who is 82 years old, asked the Manhattan Township Park District if it wanted to buy his farm. The park district decided not to farm the land or operate the petting zoo, but to keep the pumpkin festivals and occasional petting zoo events. The township wanted the barn to produce enough revenue from programs and activities to help pay for its maintenance. The Round Barn's preservation has become more of a priority since Manhattan is developing to the north.

Round barns are a disappearing resource that many groups want to save. The current price for admission is four dollars per person (age two through adults). Children under two are free. On weekends pony rides are two dollars and barrel train rides are one dollar.

People who have been to Round Barn come back home with a good feeling. When I went there, it was Halloween and I spent a whole day there. The barn was set up as being haunted. The very top of the inside of the barn was the haunted house. The theme was a haunted circus and was not really scary until I got around the exit. I came home tired, but I had fun while I was there.

The Round Barn has come a long way from its beginning including land size and use. Hopefully, in the future, the Round Barn will do the same thing. [From Student historian's interview with Alana Ferry, Round Barn Farm, April 27, 2003; The Round Barn Museum, "The Round Barn Museum circa 1898", <http://www.willcountylanduse.com/hpc/roundbarn.html> (Apr. 24, 2003); Round Barn Farm, "Round Barn Farm, Pumpkinfest, Picnic Outing, Halloween and Recreation Area", "SuburbanChicagoNews.com, Manhattan area looks for team effort to keep local attention", http://www.suburbanchicagonews.com/archives/heraldnews/2003/20030308_16.htm (Apr. 26, 2003); The Round Barn Museum, "The Round Barn", <http://mywebpages.comcast.net/carlutt/rb/museum.htm> (Apr. 24, 2003).]